

Limbum language

Limbum is a Grassfields language of Cameroon, with a small number of speakers in Nigeria. It is used as a trade language by some, but is primarily the mother tongue of the Wimbun people, who live in Donga-Mantung division of the Northwest Region, at the top of the Ring Road.

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Speakers

The Wimbun consist of three clans: War clan headquartered at Mbot, Tang clan at Tallah, and Wiya clan at Ndu.^[4] Scattered around are other Wimbun villages, each associated with one of the three clans. Each village has a chief, also known as *fon*, who is largely autonomous, and beneath him sub-chiefs or quarter-heads.^[5] The three clans are geographically interspersed, but share the language.^[4] The people live on the Nkambe Plateau, a dramatic grassy highland cut by wooded ravines, about a mile above sea level.^[6] Most are farmers, growing *maize*, *beans*, *potatoes*, *yams*, vegetable, *tomatoes*, *bananas*, and also *plantains* and *coffee* in lower, warmer areas.^{[7][8]} Some conduct trade, primarily in the towns of *Nkambé* and *Ndu*. Some work for the government, primarily in Nkambe.

Linguists consider Limbum to have three "dialects," which may be better called accents: a northern, a middle, and a southern dialect.^[9] Limbum is closely related to some neighboring languages like *Yamba* and more geographically distant ones like *Bamum*, *Ngemba* and *Bamileke*. It is quite different from some other neighboring languages like *Bebe* and *Noni*.^[10]

Grammar

Limbum's grammar is similar to English in some ways, including:

- Word order is generally *subject–verb–object*. For example, consider:
 - Dgwa Tāta ā byē' kwaā.^[11] (*normal Limbum word order*)
 - Wife Tata has carried corn. (*word-for-word English translation, retaining Limbum word order*)

Limbum	
<i>Limbum</i>	
Region	Cameroon
Native speakers	130,000 (2005) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atlantic–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none">Benue–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none">Southern Bantoid<ul style="list-style-type: none">Grassfields<ul style="list-style-type: none">Eastern<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nkambe<ul style="list-style-type: none">Limbum</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	lmp
Glottolog	limb1268 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/limb1268) ^[2]
People	Wimbun ^[3]
Language	Limbum

- Tata's wife has carried corn. (*translation with conventional English word order*)
- Verb tenses tend to be formed with auxiliary verbs like "ã" in the example above.

But Limbum differs from English in other ways. Here are a few:

- An adjective tends to *follow* the noun it modifies.
- Limbum is a tone language, meaning that spoken pitch can distinguish words which otherwise sound the same. For example, the sound "baa" spoken with different tones can mean *father*, *fufu*, *two*, *bag*, *part in hair*, or *madness*.^[12]
- The pronoun system is quite different. For example, "ye" is a gender-neutral third person singular, taking the place of *he* and *she* in English. Moving to first and second person, "wě" means *you(singular)*, "wěe" means *you(plural) and not I*, "sõ" means *you(singular) and I*, and "sěe" means *(you(singular) and we) or (you(plural) and I)*. Also, Limbum has compound pronouns, which English lacks.^[13]

Sample vocabulary

ŋwě - person	fa - give	ŋgɛp - fowl	boŋboŋ - good
njeŋwě - woman	ye - eat	nyaa - meat	bɛbɛp - bad
muu - child	laã - say	kwaã - corn	
ŋkar - friend	fã' - work	ndãp - house	baa - two
ma - mother	kõŋ - like or love	tap - hut	taar - three
ta - father	yɛ - see	afyoŋ - airplane	tâ - five
e - he or she	saŋ - write	ŋwã' - letter ^[14]	

Notes

1. Limbum (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/lmp/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Limbum" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/limb1268>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Blench, Roger (2019). *An Atlas of Nigerian Languages* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Kay Williamson Educational Foundation.
4. Pool, p. 33.
5. Kifon, p. 2-3.
6. Pool, p. 32.
7. Ndu.
8. Nkambe.
9. Fiore, p. 2.
10. Nkwi, p. 149.
11. Ndi, p. 10 and 65. In the transcriptions of Limbum on this page, I have followed the Ndis' spellings as best I can.
12. Fiore, p. 78.

13. Wepngong, p. 6.

14. Ndi, throughout.

References

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